BOMBS AWAY

A BRIEF 75th ANNIVERSARY HISTORY

of

KIRTLAND AIR FORCE BASE, NEW MEXICO

1941 – 2016

Joseph T. Page II

with

James A. Moyers

Office of History
Air Force Nuclear Weapons Center
Kirtland AFB NM
October 2016

Kirtland Air Force Base is unique. Named for an Airman who had no connection to the base or its location, Kirtland Air Force Base has arguably become more a national center for research and development, acquisition and sustainment, testing and evaluation, and combat training and readiness, than it is a traditional Air Force Base. The base populace is comprised of more non-Department of Defense civilians than Air Force personnel.

In the brief history that follows Mr. Joe Page and I highlight the first 75 years of the base—a difficult task in this small booklet. Thus this narrative is not all inclusive.

The history of Kirtland Air Force Base is actually the history of three nationally significant installations—Kirtland Air Force Base, Sandia Base, and Manzano Base—that grew out of the technological advances of World War II and the succeeding years on the mesa at the base of the Sandia and Manzano Mountains overlooking the Rio Grande and Albuquerque, New Mexico.

“Bombs Away” would have been heard countless times as bombardier cadets announced release of practice bombs to their fellow crewmembers flying training sorties from Kirtland Field during World War II. It is there the story of Kirtland Air Force Base begins.

J. A. “Al” Moyers
Center Historian
Air Force Nuclear Weapons Center

Overview

Today, Kirtland Air Force Base occupies a large military reservation within the Albuquerque, New Mexico, metropolitan area. The base's presence is significant to the local economic and social life. Several of the nation's most important defense research and development organizations share Kirtland facilities with nationally important military units. Much of Kirtland's history has been involved with military aviation since the years immediately preceding World War II. Those activities were modest indeed by today's standards, however, they led directly to Kirtland Air Force Base's present-day status as one of the nation's important research and development, acquisition and sustainment, testing and evaluation, and combat training and readiness installations.

BASE CONSTRUCTION

Military flyers had begun using the open mesa and then early airfield at Albuquerque as a convenient stop over nearly as soon as American military aviation had mastered coast-to-coast flights. With the Albuquerque Municipal Airport in planning stages by 1937, many of the same local business and civic leaders who promoted the establishment of the new facility felt that increased military aviation activity would also benefit the city. A citizen's committee was formed and sent representatives to Washington, D.C., to discuss airport plans with Army officials in the context of the possible future air base.

The outbreak of war in Europe helped further the cause. In late 1939, the Army leased from the City of Albuquerque 2,000 acres adjacent to the Municipal Airport to house a small Air Corps detachment to service transient Army and Navy aircraft. Construction began on Albuquerque Army Air Base on January 7, 1941, almost a year before America's entry into World War II. The initial $1,455,401 base construction project was completed in early August 1941.

19th Bombardment Group

Officials designed the initial construction project to house and supply the 19th Bombardment Group and its attached squadron, quartermaster, signal, ordnance, medical, chemical warfare, chapel and finance units. In addition, the existing 5,000-foot, north-south runway was lengthened to 10,000 feet in anticipation of the 19th Bombardment Group's Boeing B-17 bombers.

The first troops arrive in 1941 to man Albuquerque Army Air Base.

Commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Eugene L. Eubank (for whom Eubank Boulevard in Albuquerque is named), the flying units of the 19th Bombardment Group transferred from March Field, California, to Albuquerque in the summer of 1941 even before base construction was completed. The Group transferred to Albuquerque for its crews and support personnel to train for reconnaissance and bombing duty in the Boeing B-17 bomber. B-17s were in short supply during early 1941, so in the first months the pilots were forced to train in Douglas B-18 and Northrup A-17 aircraft, as well as Stearman PT-17 biplanes.

19th Bombardment Group Boeing B-17 FLYING FORTRESS bombers line the ramp at March Field, California.

The 3d Air Base Squadron, also assigned to the 19th Bombardment Group, preceded the flying components to Albuquerque Army Air Base in April 1941, bringing the headquarters, materiel, quartermaster, ordnance, and signal detachments.

Colonel Eubank demanded that his pilots have considerable cockpit experience and they cross-train as navigators and bombardiers as well. That thorough training subsequently paid great dividends when the 19th Bombardment Group deployed overseas to the Philippine Islands in the autumn of 1941 and would sooner than they had likely suspected found themselves intensely involved in World War II

Eagle Nest Flight Center

The U.S. Army Air Corps became the U.S. Army Air Forces on June 20, 1941, reflecting the nation's increasing military aviation preparations. Air Corps leadership had selected Trans World Airlines which had had a presence in Albuquerque for some time to provide transition training for four-engine aircraft. Trans World Airlines was the only commercial airline operating four-engine aircraft and had skilled pilots and ground crew for training cadre.

The facility was officially titled the Air Corps Ferrying Command Four-Engine Transition School but was unofficially referred to as the "Four-Engine School" or the "Jack Frye School," after the president of TWA. The location of the school was unofficially called the "Eagle Nest Flight Center."

The Army Air Corps Ferrying Command operated the school, which was organized to transport aircraft to the British Royal Air Force. Students trained on Consolidated B-24 bombers and other multi-engine aircraft in use by the Royal Air Force. The first group of trainees arrived in June 1941.

The Consolidated B-24 LIBERATOR was flown for four-engine transition training at Kirtland Field, New Mexico.

In February 1942, Army Air Forces officials transferred the four-engine school from Trans World Airlines to military instructors. In July 1942, the ferrying school transferred to Smyrna, Tennessee.

WORLD WAR II

World War II was a global conflict from 1939 to 1945. A majority of the world's great powers at the time formed two opposing military alliances known as the Allies and the Axis. Although supporting the Allied effort earlier, the United States was officially drawn into the conflict in December 1941 following the Japanese Empire's attack on U.S. forces in the Pacific. Those forces attacked included those of the 19th Bombardment Group at Clark Air Base in the Philippines and those caught trying to land at Hickam Field, Hawaii, on December 7, 1941. Airmen who trained at Kirtland Field (and the adjoining Sandia Base) took on combat assignments in all of the theaters of war.

Bombardier School

With reassignment of the 19th Bombardment Group, Army Air Forces leadership decided in October 1941 to move the bombardier school from Barksdale Field, Louisiana, to Albuquerque where ideal flying weather and large tracts of vacant land were available for use as bombing ranges.

A group of bombardier cadets walk to their Douglas B-18 BOLO trainers at Kirtland Field.

The bombardier school was designated the Air Forces Advanced Flying School, Albuquerque Army Air Base, New Mexico, with Colonel Frank D. Hackett in command of both the school and the base. The school officially activated on December 24, 1941, just days after the United States officially entered World War II.

A bombardier cadet observes the crystal clear New Mexico skies.

The bombardier school was Kirtland Field's most important and continuous activity for the duration of World War II. The initial class of 61 new bombardiers graduated and was commissioned on March 7, 1942. By 1945, the school had trained 5,719 bombardier students.

In concert with the bombardier school, Kirtland Field personnel also trained other students during the period from 1942 to 1945. A school for aviation mechanics was conducted in conjunction with maintenance operations. A navigator school also operated, although not on a scale comparable to the bombardier school.

Glider Replacement Center

A Glider Replacement Center operated at Kirtland Field for little more than 18 months in 1942 and 1943. The first prospective glider pilots arrived on July 8, 1942, to undergo fitness training in preparation for further selection for glider training. However, the whole glider training program was reorganized during February 1943, and the Kirtland School was closed. Students subsequently transferred to other military specialist schools or to aviation cadet and officer candidate schools.

Four Engine Transition

On August 1, 1943, the Army Air Forces established a B-24 Pilot Transition School at Kirtland "to train student officers on a 9-week transition course in the operation of B-24 military aircraft to qualify them to become aircraft commanders." Thus, the roar of 4-engine bombers returned to Albuquerque skies for the remainder of the war. In addition, a bombardier pilot school was established to train bomber pilots in bombing techniques and cooperation with bombardiers. By 1945, Kirtland Field had trained 1,750 pilots and crew members for the B-24 bomber alone.

During February 1945, even larger bombers arrived and flew regularly out of Kirtland Field. Combat crew training for the Boeing B-29, the nation's ultimate strategic .bomber of World War II, began at Albuquerque and continued until the end of the war.

Sandia Base

As America actively entered World War II, the Army Air Forces had an urgent need for trained aircraft mechanics and air depot service personnel for the rapidly increasing number of air bases. Air Forces officials planned to establish a training center for such personnel near Albuquerque and took over approximately 1100 acres of land adjacent to the eastern boundary of Kirtland Field for the purpose, including Oxnard Field, with its improvements. The Army acquired the property during May 1942, bringing to an end any further Oxnard Field civilian operations.

A civilian instructor trains aviation mechanic students the assembly of the hub section of a hydromatic propeller at the Albuquerque Air Depot Training Station.

As had been the case with Kirtland Field a year before, a new base seemed to appear on the East Mesa almost overnight. The base, called the Albuquerque Air Depot Training Station (and unofficially referred to as Sandia Base), was a facility of the Air Service Command of the U. S. Army Air Forces.

By June 1, 1942, training was underway, with almost 2300 officers and enlisted men stationed as instructors or students at the Air Depot Training Station. By October 1943, four Air Base Groups had been trained at the station and sent overseas, and the Army had little need for more such groups trained at Albuquerque. Consequently, the Air Depot Training Station became the Albuquerque Army Air Field when the last trained depot contingent departed.

By mid-1944, however, military officials found a new use for the field, as the Army Air Forces Convalescent Center. Barracks and support facilities were used as quarters for wounded pilots and air crewmen who were recovering from surgery and other medical service. Many old depot facilities were reactivated to provide essential services and occupational therapy for the approximately 800 convalescent airmen. In addition, the Convalescent Center established a rest and recreation facility, complete with horse- back riding and other outdoor activities, near Forest Park on the east slope of the Sandia Mountains. The facility closed in April 1945, as the need for its services dwindled, and the installation again became an Army Air Field.

Rows of surplus World War II aircraft at Sandia Base in 1946 await disposal.

The air field began receiving the first of some 2250 war-weary and surplus military aircraft as World War II came to an end. By late 1945, an impressive sight presented itself, as rows of B-24 and B-17 bombers, obsoleted by the newer and larger B-29s, awaited disposal by the Reconstruction Finance Corporation (later the War Assets Administration) at Albuquerque Army Air Field.

COLD WAR

At the end of World War II, Kirtland's future was indeterminate. The civilian and military workforce naturally declined drastically and for almost two months the base was placed in a stand-by status pending establishment of a postwar mission.

Previously transferred from the Army Air Force's Flying Training Command to Strategic Air Command's Second Air Force on March 1, 1945, Kirtland Field was inactivated by the latter organization, then again transferred to the Fourth Air Force and subsequently to the Fifteenth Air Force.

Events of 1946, however, resurrected Kirtland Field as an important installation. The military role in postwar atomic weapons development and operations was coming more nearly into focus, and the mid-1946 Operation CROSSROADS tests at Bikini Atoll in the Pacific indicated a need for base support of aircraft taking place in similar tests to follow, as well as in support of Los Alamos Laboratory tests, increasingly conducted from nearby Sandia Base. To provide that support, Kirtland Field was reactivated on December 1, 1946, as an installation of the Army Air Force's Air Materiel Command.

Beginning in the aftermath of World War II, the Cold War was a state of political and military tension between those nations considered to be in the Western Bloc (the

United States and its allies) and powers in the Eastern Bloc (the Soviet Union and its satellite states). The development of nuclear arms underpinned much of the Cold War. During 1947, Air Materiel Command leadership established Kirtland Field as an Army Air Forces' nuclear weapons facility. That mission involved a continuation of 509th Composite Wing operations conducted by units detailed to Kirtland. Additionally Kirtland and nearby Sandia Base became the home to new organizations

Passage of the Department of Defense Reorganization Act of 1947 established the United States Air Force as a separate military service replacing the U. S. Army Air Forces. On January 13, 1948, Kirtland Field became Kirtland Air Force Base.

New Mexico Air National Guard

The New Mexico Air National Guard has had a presence at Kirtland since 1947. Federally recognized as the 188th Fighter Bomber Squadron on July 7, 1947, the unit flew Martin B-26 bombers and North American F-51 fighters in its early years.

New Mexico Air National Guard pilots flew North American F-51 MUSTANGS during the Korean War.

The squadron was activated for Federal Service in the Korean War in February 1951, flying the F-51 into combat. Two 188th pilots were killed in the Korean War. First Lieutenants Robert J. Lucas and Joseph J. Murray were both killed during close air support missions. At the end of the conflict, Air National Guard pilots had flown over 1,400 sorties. The unit was released from federal active duty in November 1952.

New Mexico Air National Guard North American F-100C SUPER SABRES fly in formation.

In 1953, the 188th Fighter Squadron received their first jet aircraft, the Lockheed F-80. In the late 1950s, the squadron flew the North American F-100. In 1957, the unit was re-designated and federally recognized as the 150th Tactical Fighter Group, with the 188th Fighter Squadron as a subordinate unit.

During the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962, 150th pilots were again activated for Federal Service. The rest of the 1960s saw the 150th Tactical Fighter Group activated again for the Pueblo Crisis, and for the Vietnam Conflict. Pilots and maintainers deployed to Tuy Hoa Air Base, Republic of Vietnam, from May 1968 through May 1969.

The air war over Vietnam saw 150th Tactical Fighter Group pilots accumulate over 6,000 sorties and numerous medals for valor and bravery.

In the early 1970s, the 150th took over a new role, along with a new jet. The Air Guard maintained a detachment of F-100Cs at Holloman Air Force Base, New Mexico, to support the U.S. Army Air Defense School at Fort Bliss, Texas. In 1974, the group received the Ling-Temco-Vought A-7D, a close air support jet combat proven in Vietnam.

During Operation DESERT STORM, 150th Tactical Fighter Group leadership deployed security police members to Saudi Arabia. The group received the General Dynamics F-16 in the early 1990s, before being re-designated the 150th Fighter Wing in 1995.

On December 1, 2013, due to Department of the Air Force restructuring and realignment, the 150th Fighter Wing was renamed the 150th Special Operations Wing through a Total Force Integration with the 58th Special Operations Wing. This re-designation hailed the activation of a new mission for the 150th from a fighter unit to a special operations training unit.

Sandia National Laboratories

The Z Division, named for its Chief, Dr. Jerrold Zacharias, was the forerunner of Sandia Corporation. After the war ended in August 1945, Dr. J. Robert Oppenheimer and Dr. Zacharias, along with General Leslie R. Groves, predicted that Z Division activities would increase. During September 1945, Z Division and other Los Alamos personnel, moved to the old Oxnard Field site. There, the Manhattan Engineer District authorized construction of guard, storage, administrative, and laboratory facilities for "Sandia Base," the first time that name had been officially recognized.

During the immediate postwar period, Z Division managers continued the work they had done at Los Alamos, while military personnel were gradually replaced by civil service employees. Z Division personnel participated in the first postwar field test of atomic bombs, Operation CROSSROADS, at Bikini Atoll, during July 1946. With an increasing number of people and facilities, separation of the military functions at Sandia Base from those of Los Alamos Laboratory was desirable by mid-1946. Accordingly, Sandia Base became a military administered facility.

Z-Division facilities on Sandia Base, circa 1949.

Recognizing the fact it had become an autonomous division, on April 1, 1948, Z-Division became the Sandia Branch of Los Alamos Scientific Laboratory. One of Sandia's first challenges independent of Los Alamos was its participation in Operation SANDSTONE, the series of atomic tests conducted in the Pacific during early 1948, and intended to analyze new devices developed by Los Alamos scientists.

President Harry S. Truman signed the McMahon/Atomic Energy Act on August 1, 1946, creating the Atomic Energy Commission and transferring the control of atomic energy from the Manhattan Engineer

District to civilian hands effective January 1, 1947. This shift gave the first members of the Atomic Energy Commission complete control of the plants, laboratories, equipment, and personnel assembled during the war to produce the atomic bomb. The Commission's successor organizations to today's Department of Energy established in 1977 have continued in this role.

Sandia National Laboratories facilities on Kirtland Air Force Base circa 2009.

After a search for an organization to take over Sandia management, the Atomic Energy Commission chairman felt that both Bell Telephone Laboratories and the Western Electric Company were engaged in work similar to that done by Sandia Branch. Company officials were willing to assume management of Sandia Branch, and agreed to operate on a cost basis, without fee. Subsequently, Atomic Energy Commission officials signed a 4-year contract with the Western Electric Company to operate Sandia Corporation. With Western Electric Vice President George A. Landry as its first President, Sandia Corporation assumed control of Sandia Branch operations on November 1, 1949.

Sandia expanded rapidly during the 1950s, as its emphasis shifted from purely engineering for weapons production to other endeavors. However, Sandians continued to participate in all of the nation's nuclear tests until the Limited Nuclear Test Ban Treaty was signed with the Soviet Union, prohibiting testing in the atmosphere, in space, and under water.

The Test Ban Treaty caused Sandia Corporation to focus its emphasis on underground testing and on developing means of simulating nuclear weapons effects in the laboratory. Reflecting changes in the Sandia Corporation role, and its national importance, the name changed to Sandia Laboratories in 1968 and to Sandia National Laboratories in 1979.

Albuquerque Operations Office

On July 2, 1947, Atomic Energy Commission officials established the Office of Santa Fe Directed Operations (later, the Santa Fe Operations Office) to administer the atomic weapons field program. Despite the name, this office was physically located in Los Alamos, New Mexico.

The former Sandia Girl's School served as the Albuquerque Operations Office of the Atomic Energy Commission beginning in 1951.

To improve coordination with other Atomic Energy Commission sites and better access for employees to housing, the office transferred to Albuquerque effective June 18, 1951. The office relocated into the former Sandia Girl's School which the Army Air Forces had taken over to serve as the Army Air Forces Convalescent Center during the last years of World War II. In 1956 it became known as the Albuquerque Operations Office.

In March 2000, Department of Energy officials established the National Nuclear Security Administration to carry out the Department's national security responsibilities, including maintenance of a safe, secure, and reliable stockpile of nuclear weapons and associated materials, capabilities, and technologies. In December 2002, Administration leadership consolidated the Albuquerque Operations Office with other operations offices into the National Nuclear Security Administration Service Center. Another Kirtland tenant associated with the Department of Energy is the Department of Energy Office of Enterprise Assessments' National Training Center. The National Training Center designs, develops, and implements state-of-the-art security and safety training programs required for the protection of critical assets, including facilities, equipment, materials and information.

Armed Forces Special Weapons Project

On January 1, 1947, the Armed Forces Special Weapons Project was activated with its field headquarters at Sandia Base to replace the Manhattan Engineer District's role in the nation's atomic energy program. General Groves, former Manhattan Engineer District head, organized the Armed Forces Special Weapons Project for the purpose of directing military efforts associated with development of atomic weapons as an inter-service organization reporting directly to the War Department.

A U.S. Army Military Policeman directs traffic at an intersection on Sandia Base.

As the pace of atomic testing and special weapons development quickened, the Department of Defense created the Defense Atomic Support Agency in May 1959 to supersede the Armed Forces Special Weapons Project. The organization was renamed in 1971 to the Defense Nuclear Agency, with increasing scope for stockpile management, testing and weapons effects research programs. A quarter century later, the Defense Nuclear Agency was renamed Defense Special Weapons Agency, increasing the agency's responsibilities for nuclear threat reduction and arms control verification technology development for the Department of Defense. The Defense Special Weapons Agency did not last long before merging with the On-Site Inspection Agency, Defense Technology Security Administration to form the Defense Threat Reduction Agency in 1998. Today, the Defense Threat Reduction Agency's mission spans many areas, including Weapons of Mass Destruction nonproliferation, counter proliferation, consequence management and providing support to a safe, secure, and effective U.S. nuclear deterrent.

Manzano Base

In the early 1950s, the Armed Forces Special Weapons Project constructed a secure logistics area around a small range of Manzano Mountain foothills near Sandia Base's southeastern boundary. The Army's 8460th Special Weapons Group began operational functions there on April 4, 1950. Army control of the site was, however, a temporary measure.

The garrison area of the former Manzano Base.

Less than two years later, Air Force units replaced the Army personnel and on February 25, 1952, the area became Manzano Base, an installation reporting directly to Field Command, Armed Forces Special Weapons Project, and subsequently to Field Command, Defense Atomic Support Agency.

The USAF 1094th Special Reporting Group provided maintenance and security services for Manzano Base during the early 1950s. That unit became the 1094th Aviation Depot Group in 1955, with the subordinate 1094th Aviation Depot Squadron, 1094th Support Squadron, and 1094th Air Police Squadron as operating organizations.

Manzano Base had been considered a separate, self-contained installation, with its own administration, security, recreation, and barracks facilities, but relying on Sandia Base for logistics support. Gradually, however, Sandia Base organizations took over more and more support functions for Manzano Base. By 1971, therefore, Manzano Base had become essentially the Manzano area of Sandia Base. After the base merger in 1971, that relationship was formalized, and the storage site became the Manzano area of Kirtland Air Force Base.

Nuclear Weapons Technical Training

Armed Forces Special Weapons Project leadership organized the Nuclear Weapons Technical Training Group on January 1, 1947, on Sandia Base. Its mission was to provide training, both resident and nonresident, in support of nuclear weapon training programs worldwide; to be responsive to requests for training services and support required to meet the needs of all Department of Defense components and other cognizant agencies.

In 1967, the Group was renamed the Nuclear Training Directorate of Field Command, Defense Atomic Support Agency, and when that organization became Field Command, Defense Nuclear Agency in 1971, the Directorate became the Nuclear Weapons School. By that time, the school had furnished instruction to over 90,000 students--officers, enlisted personnel, and civilians from all branches and agencies of the Department of Defense and other departments of the U.S. government.

Nuclear Weapons School facilities circa 1971.

The Air Force became the executive agent for the school in 1971. Air Force officials renamed it the Interservice Nuclear Weapons School and assigned it to Air Training Command's 3416th Technical Training Squadron. The school operated with a faculty of technically qualified personnel from all four services. The school provided instruction to roughly 4,000 students a year in six different courses ranging in length from two to nine days.

In 1993 after more than 20 years under Air Force control, the Interservice Nuclear Weapons School transferred back to Field Command, Defense Nuclear Agency, becoming the Defense Nuclear Weapons School in 1995.

The school remained in place as the Defense Nuclear Agency became the Defense Special Weapons Agency in 1996 and the Defense Threat Reduction Agency in 1998. By 2016, the school offered a total of 38 courses with field training conducted at various sites across Kirtland Air Force Base, to include the Department of Defense's only radiological training sites.

Special Weapons Command

Then Major General Curtis E. LeMay formed a Tactical and Technical Liaison Committee in early 1947 at Kirtland to serve as the Air Force's liaison with the Armed Forces Special Weapons Project and the Atomic Energy Commission. On July 26, 1947, President Harry S. Truman signed into law the National Security Act establishing the military departments of the Army, Navy, and the Air Force. Officials renamed the committee the USAF Field Office, Atomic Energy, as its personnel continued to work with the Armed Forces Special Weapons Project. Air Force leadership soon added supervision of Air Force participation in atomic testing to the committee's mission.

A Consolidated B-36 Peacemaker on display at the 1948 Armed Forces Day airshow at Kirtland Air Force Base.

On December 1, 1949, the organization became the Special Weapons Command, a major Air Force command, for the research and development of emerging weapons technology. The nucleus of that command was composed of Air Force agencies which had coalesced at Kirtland Air Force Base following World War II to determine employment of emerging weapon systems. In addition to the functions discharged by its predecessor units, the Special Weapons Command became responsible for operating Kirtland Air Force Base and the Air Materiel Command activities at Kirtland.

A North American B-45 TORNADO assigned to the 4925th Test Group (Atomic) at Kirtland Air Force Base.

To accomplish its mission, Special Weapons Command leadership activated the 4901st Support Wing (Atomic) and its 4925th Test Group (Atomic), the latter with assigned Boeing B-50 and Convair B-36 strategic bomber aircraft. The 4925th Test Group's first jet-powered bomber, a North American B-45, arrived during mid-1950, and was followed by Boeing B-47 bombers.

Air Force Special Weapons Center

Special Weapons Command was re-designated the Air Force Special Weapons Center and assigned to Air Research and Development Command (later Air Force Systems Command) on April 1, 1952, losing its major command status. For nearly three decades, the Air Force Special Weapons Center was the Air Force's focal point for nuclear weapon systems compatibility and testing, Air Force support of live nuclear testing, and nuclear survivability and vulnerability testing and analysis. After much of the research and development efforts of the center had been spun off to form such organizations as the Air Force Weapons Laboratory, predecessor to today's Air Force Research Laboratory and the U.S. had entered international agreements ending live nuclear testing, there began a shift of defense resources from what was perceived as support activities and Air Force leadership inactivated the Air Force Special Weapons Center on April 1, 1976.

A Boeing B-52B STRATOFORTRESS assigned to the Air Force Special Weapons Center, now on display at the National Museum of Nuclear Science and History in Albuquerque, New Mexico.

Air Force Special Weapons Center personnel increasingly became involved with development of Air Force weapons in general, not just nuclear weapons. By the early 1960s, missile development work became a major emphasis in cooperation with the Air Force Missile Development Center at Holloman Air Force Base, New

Mexico. On August 1, 1970, the latter merged with Air Force Special Weapons Center to continue missile development out of Kirtland. With diminishing funds and its specialized mission waning, Air Force officials inactivated the Air Force Special Weapons Center on April 1, 1976.

Naval Weapons Evaluation Facility

The Naval Weapons Evaluation Facility was a field activity of the Naval Air Systems Command whose personnel provided test and evaluation and technical support for nuclear and nonnuclear weapons and weapons systems.

A Ling-Temco-Vought A7A Corsair II assigned to the Naval Weapons Evaluation Facility.

First formed at Kirtland Field in 1948 as a small detachment, the unit quickly grew to become the Naval Air Special Weapons Facility in August 1952. In March 1961, it was renamed the Naval Weapons Evaluation Facility. Its personnel were involved in the nuclear compatibility and safety certification of more than 76 versions of 32 different types of aircraft in the U. S. Navy inventory. The Naval Weapons Evaluation Facility inactivated in 1993.

Noncommissioned Officer Academy

The faculty of the Air Research and Development Command Non-Commissioned Officer Academy first opened their doors on February 1, 1955, one of the first such non-commissioned officer professional education institutions in the Air Force. In 1969 the Kirtland Non-Commissioned Officer Academy became the first to admit women. In 1974, the first class of Airmen arrived with the expansion to include a Leadership School. After 54 years and 418 classes, the then oldest continuously-operated Non-Commissioned Officer Academy in the Air Force inactivated on July 31, 2009.

Air Defense

In 1949 the 81st Fighter-Interceptor Wing, one of the earliest air defense units, was assigned to Kirtland Air Force Base; however, the wing soon relocated to Moses Lake Air Force Base, Washington. In May 1950, Air Defense Command stood up the Albuquerque Air Defense Sector Headquarters at Kirtland to control area air defense forces.

Air Defense fighter alert hangers on Kirtland Air Force Base circa 1955.

In 1951, the 34th Air Division activated replacing the Albuquerque Air Defense Sector. Air defense was supported by the Convair F-102 aircraft of the 93rd Fighter Interceptor Squadron and radar squadrons at West Mesa and Moriarty Air Force Stations. The Aircraft Control and Warning Center coordinated the activities of radar stations associated with the Albuquerque Air Defense Sector in New Mexico, Utah, Colorado, and part of Texas.

In 1960, the 34th Air Division was re-designated the Albuquerque Air Defense Sector, and assigned to the 33d Air Division, defending New Mexico and part of Texas. The sector was inactivated in November 1960 due to air defense funding cutbacks and a rising emphasis on detecting intercontinental ballistic missiles instead of manned bombers.

Airfield Changes

As the level of military activity and the need for adequate airfield maintenance and security increased, the City of Albuquerque deeded leased runways and airfield land (2,404 acres) to the Air Force for one dollar, with the stipulation that commercial airlines would be allowed to use the runway and taxiway facilities.

Base engineers and contractors followed a seven-year (1950-1957) base master plan in expanding Kirtland's industrial and test facilities, including lengthening the main runway to 13,373 feet, making it the nation's longest operational runway at the time.

In 1966, the airfield, taxiways, and other properties were sold to the City of Albuquerque to become the Albuquerque International Airport. Kirtland Air Force Base became a tenant to the airport and, as part of the agreement, supplied emergency services.

Air Force Directorate of Nuclear Surety

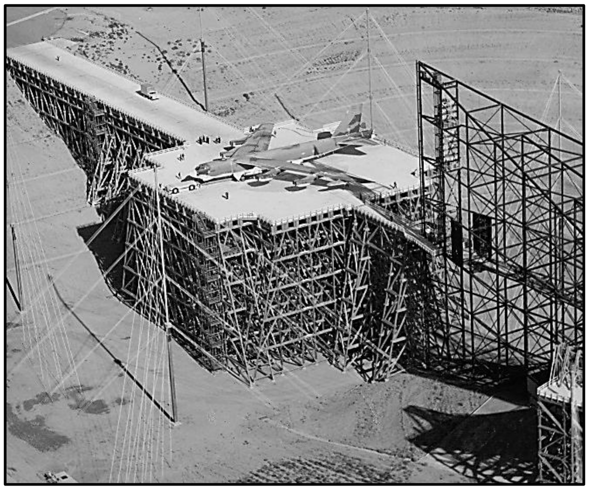
In August 1959, Air Force Inspection and Safety Center leadership at Norton Air Force Base, California, located the Directorate of Nuclear Surety at Kirtland to more easily exchange ideas and coordinate on nuclear-related matters with other agencies in the nuclear community. The members of the directorate served as the focal point for monitoring and administering the worldwide Air Force Nuclear Surety Program. Following the movement of the Air Force Safety Center to Kirtland in 1993, the directorate was again folded into the Center.

Air Force Weapons Laboratory

On May 1, 1963, the Air Force Weapons Laboratory was established at Kirtland from elements of the Air Force Special Weapons Center to engage in weapons research and development of simulation techniques, since atmospheric, space, or underwater testing was no longer possible.

Colonel Raymond A. Gilbert unveils the Air Force Weapons Laboratory sign on Kirtland Air Force Base in 1963.

To study transient radiation, X-rays, and electro- magnetic pulse, the Air Force Weapons Laboratory Transmission Line Aircraft Simulator, more commonly referred to as the TRESTLE, the largest simulator facility ever built, was completed on Kirtland Air Force Base in 1980 and laboratory personnel conducted electro-magnetic pulse testing until 1994.



A Boeing B-52 STRATOFORTRESS sits on the deck of the Air Force Weapons Laboratory Transmission Line Aircraft Simulator to be tested.

Base Merger

With phasedown of the Special Weapons School, a more economical administration of remaining military activities, as well as utilization of vacated school and office facilities was desirable. Since Kirtland Air Force Base was adjacent to Sandia Base's western boundary, the most reasonable solution appeared to be a merger of the two bases under Air Force control. On July 1, 1971, Manzano Base and Sandia Base merged with Kirtland Air Force Base.

Contract Management Division

In 1972, the Air Force Contract Management Division transferred from Los Angeles Air Force Station, California, to Kirtland. The Division's mission was to insure that industry fulfilled its contractual commitments and provided quality weapons, supplies and equipment on schedule to meet national defense requirements in support of systems acquisition. The organization moved into facilities vacated by the Nuclear Weapons School on what had been Sandia Base.

Air Force Contract Management Division offices on Kirtland Air Force Base, today headquarters for the 377th Air Base Wing.

After the inactivation of the Air Force Special Weapons Center in 1976, Air Force Contract Management Division took over host base duties for Kirtland, gaining the subordinate 4900 Air Base Wing. However, the division's administration of Kirtland did not last long. In July 1977, the base was transferred from Air Force Systems Command to Military Airlift Command, relieving Air Force Contract Management Division of its responsibilities and inactivating the 4900th Air Base Wing. The division remained on Kirtland until its inactivation in June 1990.

Air Force Security Forces Center

On September 1, 1979, Air Force officials established the Air Force Office of Security Police at Kirtland Air Force Base. They had envisioned the office to be part of the planned Air Force Inspector General Activities Center that was activated at Kirtland Air Force Base in 1979, but the Center soon inactivated leaving just the Air Force Office of Security Police.

The senior officer of the Air Force Office of Security Police served as the Air Force Chief of Security Police and was responsible to the Air Force Inspector General to develop the operational policies and standards for the security of Air Force resources and classified information.

Air Force Office of Security Police personnel annually hosted the Air Force Worldwide Information Security Workshop and the PEACEKEEPER CHALLENGE competition to test the skills of Security Police teams from across the Air Force and other services. Air Force officials relocated the office and its personnel to Lackland Air Force Base, Texas in 1997 becoming the Air Force Security Forces Center

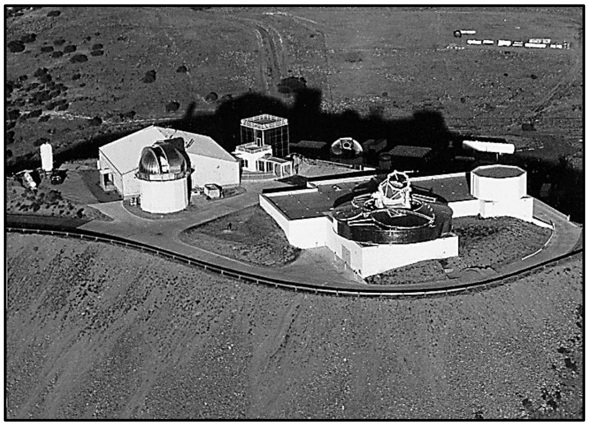
Space Technology

On October 1, 1982, the Air Force Space Technology Center activated at Kirtland to become the focal point for technology planning and development for Air Force space missions. The Air Force Space Technology Center managed the Air Force Weapons Laboratory on Kirtland Air Force Base; the Geophysics Laboratory at Hanscom Air Force Base, Massachusetts; and the Astronautics Laboratory at Edwards Air Force Base, California.

Air Force Laboratory Consolidation

In 1990, officials re-designated the Air Force Space Technology Center as the Phillips Laboratory, after General Samuel C. Phillips, a former Director of the Apollo Manned Lunar Landing Project. Each of the geographically separate laboratories became directorates within the Phillips Laboratory organizational structure. On October 31, 1997, Phillips Laboratory was inactivated as its components were reorganized into the Air Force Research Laboratory structure.

Two directorates still reside at Kirtland. The Space Vehicles Directorate serves as the Air Force's center of excellence for space technology research and development, transitioning space technologies to provide capabilities in areas such as space-based intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance, space situational awareness, space communications, position navigation and timing, and defensive space control.



Air Force Research Laboratory's Starfire Optical Range facilities on Kirtland Air Force Base.

The Directed Energy Directorate is the Air Force's center of excellence for directed energy technology, with over 860,000 square feet of state-of-the-art research laboratories and testing structures at Kirtland. Unique facilities include the Starfire Optical Range at Kirtland, a testing site at the U.S. Army's White Sands Missile Range, and the Air Force Maui Optical and Supercomputing Site in Hawaii.

Combat Crew Training

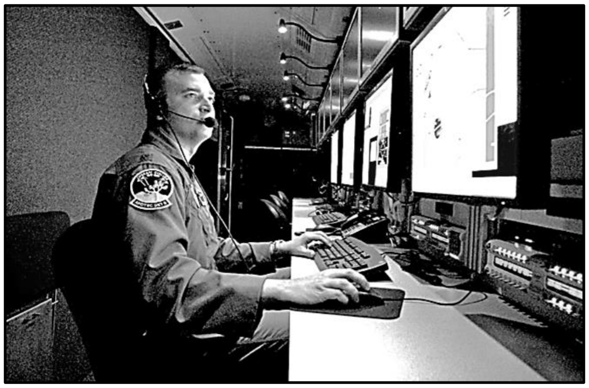
Drawing upon the experience of combat search and rescue in Southeast Asia, the Air Mobility Command activated the 1550th Aircrew Training and Test Wing at Hill Air Force Base, Utah, on April 1, 1971, to serve as a test center and school house for rescue aircrews and technology.

A 1550th Combat Crew Training Wing Sikorsky SH-3 Sea King helicopter participates in a survival exercise at Elephant Butte Lake in New Mexico.

The wing moved to Kirtland Air Force Base on February 20, 1976, and continued training helicopter and fixed-wing aircrews. The Air Force re-designated the unit as the 1550th Combat Crew Training Wing on May 15, 1984.

Test and Evaluation Center

Early in 1974, Air Force leadership acknowledged Congressional concerns of independent testing by activating the Air Force Operational Test and Evaluation Center, a Direct Reporting Unit to Headquarters United States Air Force. Center personnel of this independent agency directed and/or oversaw operational testing of emerging Air Force aircraft and systems in realistic battlespace environments.



An Air Force Operational Test and Evaluation Center test team member monitors information from a Northrop Grumman RQ-4 Global Hawk unmanned aircraft.

Since it first activated, Air Force leadership has expanded the role of the Air Force Operational Test and Evaluation Center, assigning most initial and qualification Operational Test and Evaluation to the Center. Center personnel continue to contribute to the successful acquisition and operational employment of numerous weapon and support systems.

POST-COLD WAR

At the Malta Summit on December 3, 1989, President George H. W. Bush and Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev issued statements strongly suggesting that the long-standing animosities at the core of the Cold War might be coming to an end. The unraveling of the Soviet Bloc began in 1989 and by December 1991, the Soviet Union had dissolved. After 45 years, the Cold War was over. In 1992, as part of Department of Defense reductions, the Air Force underwent a major organizational change with the consolidation of several major commands. The newly re-designated Air Mobility Command initially continued management of Kirtland Air Force Base in this post-Cold War era. On January 1, 1993, management of Kirtland Air Force Base transferred to Air Force Materiel Command, a merger of Air Force Systems Command and Air Force Logistics Command. On October 1, 2015, base management again changed hands, as the Air Force Global Strike Command assumed administration of Kirtland Air Force Base.

Base Host Changes

The members of the 1606th Air Base Wing had overseen the operation of Kirtland Air Force Base since 1977. Air Mobility Command officials inactivated the 1606 Air Base Wing and transferred the host responsibility on October 1, 1991, to the newly activated 542d Crew Training Wing. That transfer was short-lived with the re-assignment of Kirtland Air Force Base to Air Force Materiel Command effective January 1, 1993. The new host unit of Kirtland Air Force Base, the combat-decorated 377th Air Base Wing was re-activated on January 1, 1993. In 2016, the base celebrated the 50th Anniversary of the initial activation of the wing.

Air Force Safety & Inspection

In July 1993, with the closure of Norton Air Force Base, California, the Air Force Safety Center and Air Force Inspection Agency moved to Kirtland Air Force Base. In 1971, Air Force officials had activated the Air Force Inspection and Safety Center, a Separate Operating Agency, at Norton Air Force Base. In August 1991, they separated the functions within the Center into separate organizations.

Today, the Air Force Inspection Agency is a Field Operating Agency of Headquarters United States Air Force. Its personnel provide independent assessments of acquisition, nuclear surety, operations, logistics, support, and healthcare to Air Force senior leadership. Carrying on the lineage of Air Force Inspection and Safety Center, they celebrated their 45th Anniversary in 2016.

An Air Force Inspection Agency member monitors actions for compliance during an inspection.

Activated as the Air Force Safety Agency in 1991, Air Force leadership re-designated it a Center in 1996. As a Field Operating Agency of Headquarters United States Air Force, Safety Center personnel develop, implement, execute and evaluate Air Force aviation, occupational, weapons, space and system mishap prevention and nuclear surety programs and policy. They celebrated their 20th Anniversary as the Air Force Safety Center in 2016.

Students in an Air Force Safety Center Aircraft Mishap Investigation Course review mishap indicators at a field laboratory.

Space Systems Development & Test

Given the significant presence of space research and development activities on Kirtland Air Force Base, in 1993 then Air Force Materiel Command's Space and Missile Systems Center leadership relocated their space Research, Development, Test and Evaluation activities to Kirtland Air Force Base. In 1995, they designated these Kirtland activities the Space and Missile Test and Evaluation Directorate. With the re-alignment of Space and Missile Systems Center from Air Force Materiel Command to Air Force Space Command in 2001, Detachment 12 activated at Kirtland Air Force Base. Space and Missile Systems Center officials activated the Space Development and Test Wing in 2006 at Kirtland Air Force Base. In 2010, in reorganization of Space and Missile Systems Center, the Space Development and Test Wing inactivated and became the Space Development and Test Directorate. Space and Missile Systems Center leadership inactivated the Space Development and Test Directorate in 2014 and stood-up the Advanced Systems and Development Directorate at Kirtland Air Force Base.

Throughout these changes, directorate members continued to develop, test and evaluate Air Force space systems; execute advanced space development and demonstration projects; and transition capabilities to the warfighter in coordination with the Operationally Responsive Space Office which began work at Kirtland in 2007. The Operationally Responsive Space Office was a concept to field new space requirements from conception to warfighter operation within a short period.

Global War on Terrorism

After the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, the Bush Administration declared a worldwide "war on terror," involving open and covert military operations. Many members of the Kirtland Air Force Base community, military and civilian, deployed in support of the Global War on Terror throughout its many phases. Some made the ultimate sacrifice and base features were memorialized in their honor. In 2003, Major Steven Plumhoff of the 58th Special Operations Wing was killed in a helicopter crash in Afghanistan. Wing leadership renamed the entrance road to the 58th Special Operations Wing complex in 2004 as Plumhoff Way. Base officials named Frost Avenue in honor of SSgt Christopher Frost of the 377th Air Base Wing who was killed in 2008 when the helicopter he was a passenger on crashed. They dedicated Griffin Avenue in 2012 to the memory of SSgt Travis Griffin who was killed in Iraq in 2008.

Distributed Modeling & Simulation

Air Combat Command activated the 705th Combat Training Squadron in 2006 to operate the Distributed Modeling Operations Center on Kirtland Air Force Base. The Center traces its heritage to 1979 when the original concept was the Identification, Friend, Foe, Neutral Facility. It became known as the Theater Air Command and Control Simulation Facility in 1990, and renamed to its current designation in 2003. The Center is a modeling and simulation facility with more than 30 simulators to improve warfighter capabilities through command and control testing, tactics development, and training. Its personnel develop, integrate and deliver a virtual Air, Space and Cyber warfare environment for Air Force, joint and coalition combat training, test and experimentation.

Air Force E-3 Airborne Warning and Control System crewmembers man an E-3 simulator in the Distributed Modeling Operations Center on Kirtland Air Force Base.

Special Operations Training

In an effort to minimize overhead, Air Mobility Command officials inactivated the 1550th Combat Crew Training Wing and the 1606th Air Base Wing on October 1, 1991, and transferred the training and base host missions to the 542d Crew Training Wing. Officials later transferred the mission to Air Education and Training Command's 58th Special Operations Wing.

A flight of 58th Special Operations Wing Bell Boeing CV-22 OSPREYS lifts off from Kirtland Air Force Base.

58th Special Operations Wing personnel train Air Force special operations and combat search and rescue aircrews, training over 2,000 students a year. The wing provides undergraduate, graduate and refresher aircrew training for special operations, rescue, missile site support and distinguished visitor airlift helicopter, fixed-wing, and tilt-rotor operations.

The wing has operated numerous weapon systems, including the Bell UH-1H, Bell UH-1N, Sikorsky HH-60G, Sikorsky MH-53J, Lockheed HC-130P/N, Lockheed MC-130P, Lockheed MC-130H, and Bell Boeing CV-22. The Air Force's first operational CV-22 arrived at Kirtland Air Force Base on March 20, 2006. Wing personnel teach more than 100 courses in 18 different crew positions including pilot, navigator, electronic warfare officer, flight engineer, communications system operator, loadmaster and aerial gunner.

Additionally, the wing responds to worldwide contingencies and provides search and rescue support to the local community. Since moving to Kirtland, 58th Special Operations Wing aircrews have participated in more than 300 rescue operations and its members have been credited with saving more than 225 lives.

Air Force Pararescue School

Kirtland Air Force Base has been home to pararescue (PJ) training since 1976 when Air Rescue Service transferred the training from Hill Air Force Base, Utah. In those 40 years there have been a number of organizational schemes for the school.

Pararescue students participant in a training exercise as part to their qualification training.

On June 14, 2016, Air Education and Training Command leaders activated the 351st Battlefield Airman Training Squadron as the latest the US Air Force Pararescue and Combat Rescue Officer School unit. Squadron personnel conducted both a 24-week paramedic course and a 20-week pararescue recovery course for qualification as a pararescue recovery specialist.

Air Force Nuclear Weapons Center

Drawing upon the heritage of the Air Force Special Weapons Command previously discussed, Air Force Materiel Command leadership activated the Nuclear Weapons Center on March 31, 2006, at Kirtland Air Force Base to build a center of excellence for nuclear weapons sustainment and modernization by bringing together the several entities within the command supporting nuclear weapons systems. Air Force leadership directed this action to curb what was seen as the increasing fragmentation of nuclear weapon systems sustainment and modernization.

Activation of the Center began a phased approach to re-building what is today “the Nucleus of America’s Deterrent.” On February 28, 2009, Air Force leadership re-designated the center the Air Force Nuclear Weapons Center to reflect the growth of the center’s mission as it began to incorporate nuclear sustainment and acquisition organizations from other major commands in order to continue to reinvigorate and strengthen the Air Force nuclear enterprise.

The Air Force Nuclear Weapons Center again reorganized its structure on March 30, 2015, realigning responsibilities, authorities and accountability to better serve as Air Force Materiel Command's materiel manager for Air Force nuclear weapon systems.

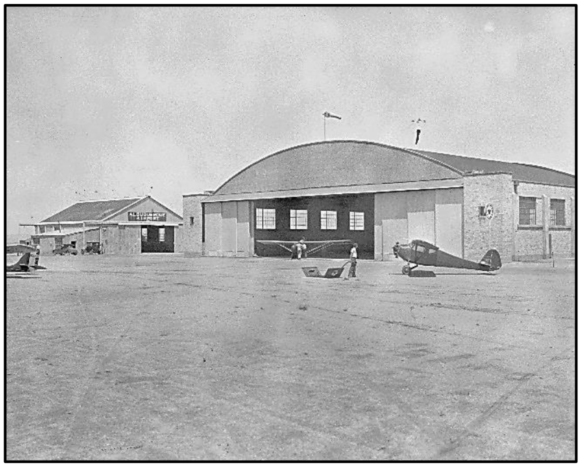
On October 1, 2015, Air Force officials reassigned the 377th Air Base Wing from the Air Force Nuclear Weapons Center to Air Force Global Strike Command's Twentieth Air Force thereby removing Center leadership from the Kirtland Air Force Base management chain of command.

As of this writing, the Air Force Nuclear Weapons Center was organized with a headquarters staff and four execution directorates--the Air Delivered Capabilities Directorate and the Nuclear Technology and Integration Directorate at Kirtland Air Force Base; the Intercontinental Ballistic Missile Systems Directorate at Hill Air Force Base, Utah; and the Nuclear Command, Control, and Communications Integration Directorate at Hanscom Air Force Base, Massachusetts.

Headquarters of the Air Force Nuclear Weapons Center on Kirtland Air Force Base.

Conclusion

Today, Kirtland Air Force Base has evolved into an installation different in many respects from its major predecessors – Oxnard Field, Sandia Base, Manzano Base and Kirtland Field. The scope of its present-day activities could not have been imagined back in 1928, when the old Albuquerque Airport first opened for aviation business.



Aircraft hangars at the first Albuquerque Airport, most often referred to as Oxnard Field, in the 1930s.

As noted in the preface, this brief narrative merely highlights some of the nearly 100 organizations that call Kirtland Air Force Base home. In addition to those members of Team Kirtland already noted, the base is home to a number of other unique organizations such as the Joint Navigation Warfare Center which was established on Kirtland in 2004 as an element of United States Strategic Command; a component of the Missile Defense Agency whose roots on Kirtland Air Force Base trace to the 1990s Airborne Laser Program; and a field office of the Defense Logistics Agency that supports base activities. These many organizations comprise the distinctive partnership that is Kirtland Air Force Base.

SELECT CHRONOLOGY

1941

Albuquerque Army Air Base is built.

Colonel Frank D. Hackett becomes the first commander with one B-18 bomber.

The 19th Bombardment Group arrives and trains crews on B-17s, B-18s, and PT-17s.

1942

The installation is renamed to Kirtland Army Air Field in honor of Colonel Roy C. Kirtland, pioneer Army aviator who returned to active duty but died in 1941.

Practice bombing ranges cover more than 2,000 square miles with simulated cities, warships, and other military objects.

1943

The Army Air Forces Pilot School trains on B-17s and B-24s.

The 38th Flying Training Wing moves to Kirtland.

1945

Training begins on the new B-29.

The Manhattan Engineering District establishes Z Division on Sandia Base.

Kirtland Field transfer from the Army Air Forces Western Flying Training Command to Strategic Air Command.

1946

Kirtland becomes part of Air Materiel Command.

The primary mission at Kirtland is defined as weapons research, development, test, and evaluation.

The Armed Forces Special Weapons Project is created to conduct military functions relating to the Atomic Energy Commission.

1947

The United States Air Force is established.

The New Mexico Air National Guard comes to Kirtland as the 188th Fighter-Bomber Squadron with T-6s, P-51s and A-26s.

The Armed Forces Special Weapons Project begins construction of a weapons storage area in the Manzanita Mountains foothills.

1948

Kirtland Field is re-designated as Kirtland Air Force Base.

The Tactical and Technical Liaison Committee becomes the Air Force Field Office for Atomic Energy.

Sandia Laboratories are established from the Z Divisions.

1949

The Air Force Special Weapons Command is activated.

The 81st Fighter Wing moves to Kirtland to provide an air defense force in New Mexico.

1950

The 93d Fighter Interceptor Squadron takes over the air defense mission as the Albuquerque Air Defense Sector with F-86s and F-102s.

1952

Air Force Special Weapons Command becomes the Air Force Special Weapons Center and operates B-50s, B-45s, B-36s, B-47s and B-52s.

1955

The 4900th Air Base Group becomes the base host.

1960

The Special Weapons Center is involved in missile research and development.

1963

The new Air Force Weapons Laboratory takes over research work and technical activities on Kirtland.

1971

Sandia and Manzano Bases merge with Kirtland and form Kirtland Air Force Base with the 4900th Air Base Wing as the host unit.

1974

The Air Force (later Operational) Test and Evaluation Center is organized to oversee the Air Force's independent testing and evaluation of weapons systems.

1976

The Air Force Special Weapons Center is inactivated.

The 1550th Aircrew Training and Test Wing moves to Kirtland and tests/trains in H-1, H-3, H-53, and C-130 aircraft.

1977

Military Airlift Command takes control of Kirtland and the 1606th Air Base Wing takes over as host unit.

1978

The Trestle Electromagnetic Pulse Simulator is built. It subjects aircraft and equipment to 10 million volts to assess electromagnetic pulse effects.

1979

Congress designates Sandia Laboratories as a national laboratory for Department of Energy work.

1982

The Air Force Space Technology Center opens for planning and managing Air Force space research and development.

1990

Phillips Laboratory opens to serve as one of four Air Force space laboratories and Centers of Excellence for laser technology.

1992

The New Mexico Air National Guard transitions from the Ling-Temco-Vought A-7 to the General Dynamics F-16.

1993

Air Force Materiel Command assumes control of Kirtland Air Force Base and the 377th Air Base Wing is reactivated as the host organization.

The Air Force Inspection Agency and the Air Force Safety Center move to Kirtland.

The Space and Missile Systems Center activates a detachment at Kirtland for space research, development, test and evaluation.

1994

The 542d Crew Training Wing inactivates and its mission is transferred to the 58th Special Operations Wing.

1995

The New Mexico Air National Guard is re-designated 150th Fighter Wing.

1997

The Air Force Research Laboratory is formed and Phillips Laboratory realigns as the Space Vehicles and Directed Energy Directorates.

2001

The 150th Fighter Wing is among the first to scramble after the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001.

2006

The Nuclear Weapons Center is activated, along with the 498th Armament Systems (later Nuclear Systems) Wing, to manage weapons system acquisition, modernization, and sustainment.

2007

Ms. Carter Reynolds, granddaughter of Colonel Roy C. Kirtland, visits the base.

New Mexico Air Force Bases – Kirtland, Holloman, and Cannon – celebrate the Air Force's 60th Anniversary at Sandia Resort in Albuquerque.

2008

Air Force leadership re-designates the Nuclear Weapons Center as the Air Force Nuclear Weapons Center.

Staff Sergeant Christopher Frost of the 377th Air Base Wing Public Affairs Office is the first fatality in Iraq from Kirtland Air Force Base.

Staff Sergeant Travis L. Griffin of the 377th Security Forces Squadron dies as a result of wounds from an Improvised Explosive Device while on patrol in Baghdad, Iraq.

2009

The 498 th Munitions Maintenance Group relocates from Kirtland to Whiteman AFB, Missouri.

2010

Air Force Materiel Command leadership inactivates the 498th Nuclear Systems Group.

Dignitaries cut the ribbon on the Guardian Angel Rescue/Recovery Training Center.

2011

Kirtland officials conduct the official opening of the Battlespace Environment Laboratory.

F Avenue is renamed Frost Avenue in honor of Staff Sergeant Christopher Frost.

505th Distributed Warfare Group is inactivated.

415th Special Operations Squadron is activated.

377th Security Forces Group and 377th Weapons Systems Security Squadron are activated.

2012

M Avenue is renamed Griffin Avenue in honor of Staff Sergeant Travis L. Griffin.

Bicentennial Park is renamed Marquez Park in honor of Lieutenant General Leo Marquez.

The 498th Nuclear Systems Wing is inactivated.

2013

Officials open the Space Sensors Laboratory.

2014

Air National Guard leadership re-designate the 150th Fighter Wing as the 150th Special Operations Wing.

2015

377th Air Base Wing is reassigned from Air Force Materiel Command to Air Force Global Strike Command.

2016

Kirtland Air Force Base officials celebrate the 75th Anniversary of the construction of Kirtland Field.

BIOGRAPHY

COLONEL ROY C.KIRTLAND

Official photo of Colonel Roy C. Kirtland taken at the Presidio of San Francisco in 1935.

Kirtland Air Force Base is named after Colonel Roy Carrington Kirtland, the third oldest military pilot in the U.S. Army Air Corps at the time of his death in 1941. He played a prominent role in early Air Corps aviation.

Born at Fort Benton, Montana, on May 14, 1874, Kirtland enlisted in the U.S. Army in 1898, eventually earning a commission as a second lieutenant of Infantry on August 29, 1901. In March 1911, Roy Kirtland was transferred from the Infantry Division to the Air Service and placed in charge of the U.S. Aviation School at College Park, Maryland.

Colonel Kirtland is one of the early Army pilots, receiving in 1911 Certificate No. 46 from the *Federation Aeronautique Internationale*. He also held Expert Aviator License No. 11 from the Aero Club of America. From April to June 1911, he was in charge of the U.S. Aviation School at College Park, Maryland. Roy Kirtland went on to command the First Aero Squadron in 1913 and served in various Signal Corps aviation school capacities until his return to the Infantry Division in 1915.

After rejoining the Signal Corps Aviation Section in 1917, he was assigned the task of organizing motor mechanic regiments, and then assumed command of the Third Regiment in France. While overseas, he served as inspector of aviation in England and Air Service rest camps.

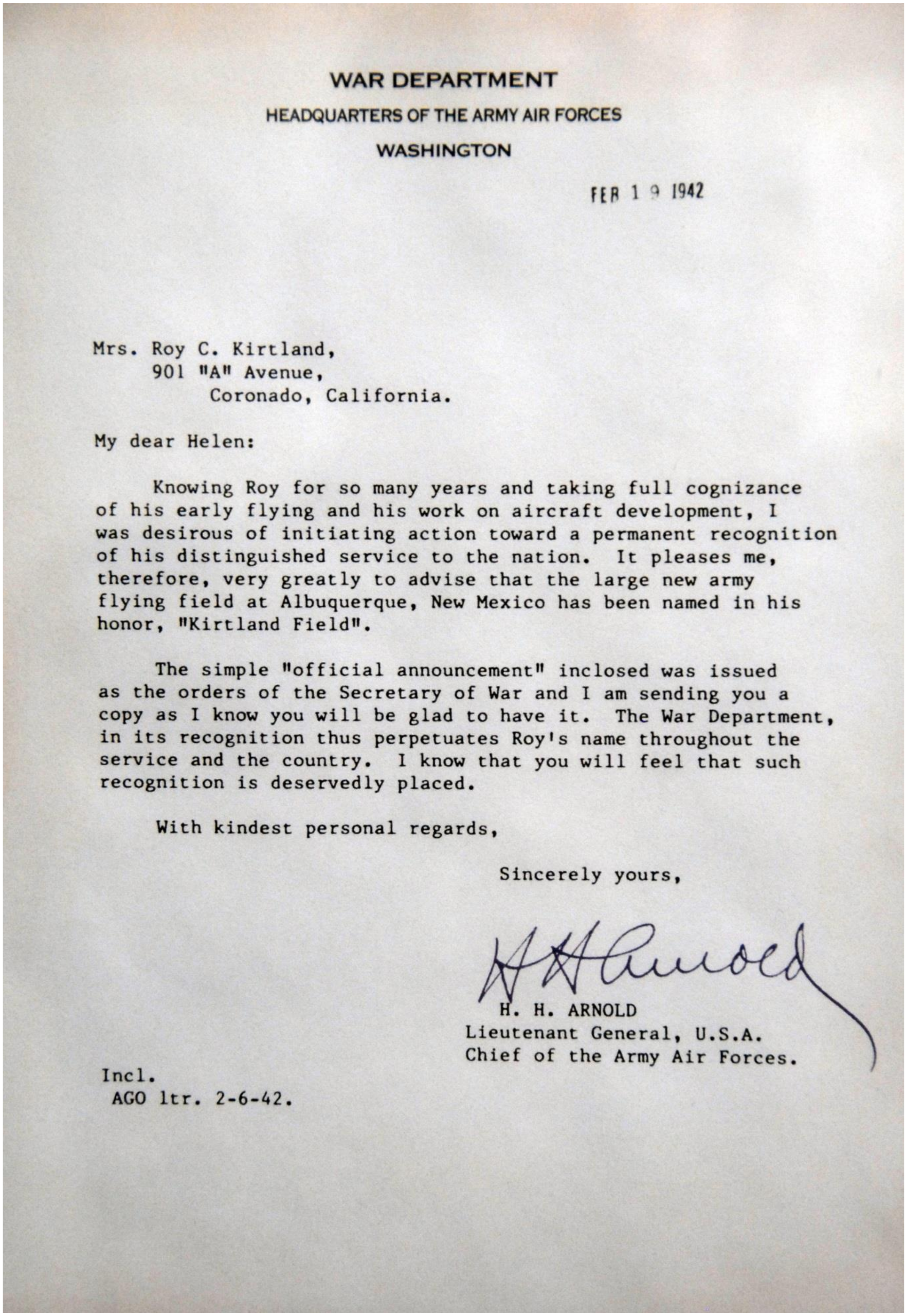
After World War I, Colonel Kirtland became a flight instructor, commanded aviation supply depots, and later graduated from the U.S. Army War College.

During the late 1920s, he served with the General Staff until his appointment in 1930, as Commandant of Langley Field, Virginia, and as acting Commandant of the Air Corps Tactical School. Colonel Roy C. Kirtland retired from the military in 1938 after 40 years of dedicated service.

However, three years later at the age 65, he returned to active duty at the West Coast Army Air Forces Training Center, Moffett Field, California. On May 2, 1941, he died there from a heart attack. On February 25, 1942, at the special request of General 'Hap' Arnold, Albuquerque Army Air Base was renamed Kirtland Army Air Field in honor of his friend, Roy C. Kirtland.

On January 13, 1948, Kirtland Army Air Field became Kirtland Air Force Base. Later, on July 1, 1971, Kirtland Air Force Base, Sandia Base, and Manzano Base merged to become the sixth largest in the Air Force, occupying over 52,000 acres in central New Mexico.

Lieutenant Roy C. Kirtland at the controls of a Wright Flyer.



WAR DEPARTMENT
HEADQUARTERS OF THE ARMY AIR FORCES
WASHINGTON

FEB 19 1942

Mrs. Roy C. Kirtland,
901 "A" Avenue,
Coronado, California.

My dear Helen:

Knowing Roy for so many years and taking full cognizance of his early flying and his work on aircraft development, I was desirous of initiating action toward a permanent recognition of his distinguished service to the nation. It pleases me, therefore, very greatly to advise that the large new army flying field at Albuquerque, New Mexico has been named in his honor, "Kirtland Field".

The simple "official announcement" inclosed was issued as the orders of the Secretary of War and I am sending you a copy as I know you will be glad to have it. The War Department, in its recognition thus perpetuates Roy's name throughout the service and the country. I know that you will feel that such recognition is deservedly placed.

With kindest personal regards,

Sincerely yours,

H H Arnold

H. H. ARNOLD
Lieutenant General, U.S.A.
Chief of the Army Air Forces.

Incl.
AGO ltr. 2-6-42.

APPENDIX A

BASE COMMANDERS

377th Air Base Wing

Col Eric H. Froehlich, May 2015

Col Tom D. Miller, Jul 2013

Col David J. Hornyak (interim), Aug 2011

Col John C. Kubinec, Dec 2011

Col Robert L. Maness, Apr 2010

Col Michael S. Duvall, Jul 2008

Col Robert E. Suminsby, Jul 2006

Col Terrence A. Feehan, Jul 2005

Col Henry L. Andrews Jr., Jul 2003

Col Kathleen D. Close, Jan 2002

Col Jan D. Eakle, Sep 2000

Col Polly A. Peyer, Jun 1999

Col Gary D. Dills, Nov 1996

Col Elizabeth A. Harrell, Jun 1995

Brig Gen Charles H. Perez, Feb 1994

Col Felix Sanchez (interim), Nov 1993

Brig Gen James L. Higham, Jan 1993

542d Crew Training Wing

Brig Gen James L. Higham, Oct 1991

1606th Air Base Wing

Col Gary C. Vycital, Jun 1991

Col Edward S. Brannum, Jun 1990

Col Thomas W. Sullivan, Jul 1988

Col Charles G. Thomas, Jun 1988

Col David W. Scott, Jul 1983

Col Gary H. Mears, Jun 1982

Col James N. Hockney, Jun 1981

Col Jack W. Sheppard, Feb 1979

Col Archer L. Durham, Jul 1977

4900th Air Base Wing

Col James B. Myers, Apr 1976

4900th Air Base Group (ARDC & AFSC)

Col Raymond H. Gilbert Jr, Jun 1975

Col James B. Myers, Oct 1972

Col Charles G. Mathison, Oct 1970

Col James T. Corn, Jan 1970

Col Norman T. Kincade, Aug 1967

Col John J. Dishuck, Jul 1966

Col William H. Gauss, Jan 1966

Col Bernice S. Barr, Sep 1961

Col Carmel M. Shook, Jun 1961

Col Marion R. McCracken, Jun 1957

Col Harry G. Hamby Jr., Aug 1952

4901st Special Weapons Wing

Col Perry B. Griffith, Jul 1950

2758th Experimental Wing

Col Harold A. Gunn, Jun 1948

428th AAF Base Unit

Lt Col McLyle G. Zumwalt, Sep 1947

Col Howard G. Bunker, Apr 1947

Col Perry M. Hoisington II, Jan 1947

Lt Col McLyle G. Zumwalt, Dec 1946

Lt Col Delbert H. Hahn, Jan 1946

Col Alva L. Harvey, Oct 1945

Col Frank A. Kurtz, Mar 1945

Col Lewis W. Proper, Oct 1944

3007th AAF Base Unit

Col William B. Offutt, Sep 1943

Col Frank D. Hackett, Mar 1941

3d Air Base Squadron

Maj Newman R. Laughinghouse, Jan 1941

Air Corps Liaison Officer

Maj Albert D. Smith, Oct 1940

APPENDIX B

BASE MAJOR COMMAND ASSIGNMENTS

Air Force Combat Command
8 Mar 1941 – 6 Dec 1941

West Coast Air Corps Training Center
6 Dec 1941 – 23 Jan 1942

Training Command
23 Jan 1942 - 1 Mar 1945

Second Air Force
1 Mar 1945 – 31 Jan 1946

Fourth Air Force
31 Jan 1946 – 16 Apr 1945

Continental Air Forces
16 Apr 1945 – 21 Mar 1946

Strategic Air Command
21 Mar 1946 – 1 Dec 1946

Air Materiel Command
1 Dec 1946 – 1 Dec 1949

Special Weapons Command
1 Dec 1949 - 1 Apr 1952

Air Research and Development Command
1 Apr 1952 - 1 Apr 1961

Air Force Systems Command
1 Apr 1961 – 1 Jul 1977

Military Airlift Command
1 Jul 1977 – 1 Jun 1992

Air Mobility Command
1 Jun 1992 – 1 Jan 1993

Air Force Materiel Command
1 Jan 1993 – 1 Oct 2015

AIR FORCE GLOBAL STRIKE COMMAND

Air Force Global Strike Command
1 Oct 2015 – Present

APPENDIX C

TEAM KIRTLAND

Organization	Since
Air Force Nuclear Weapons Center (AFNWC)	2006
Air Force Operational Test and Evaluation Center (AFOTEC)	1974
Air Force Safety Center (AFSEC)	1993
Air Force Research Laboratory (AFRL)	1992
58th Special Operations Wing (58 SOW)	1993
150th Special Operations Wing (150 SOW)	1947
Defense Threat Reduction Agency (DTRA)	1998
Sandia National Laboratories (SNL)	1946
Department of Energy (DOE)	1977
705th Combat Training Squadron (705 CTS)	2006
Advanced Systems and Development Directorate	2014
Air Force Inspection Agency (AFIA)	1993
351st Battlefield Airmen Training Squadron (351 BATS)	2016
377th Air Base Wing (377 ABW)	1993